



See <http://www.burialitems.com> Email a-team@stratos.net

A TEAM Master's

Date Of Oct. 1st, 2002

"WE save our customers a considerable amount of money on funeral products & more!"

262 SHELTON BLVD. EASTLAKE, OHIO 44095

440-942-8769 OR FAX 440-951-6871 - 800-595-1313

The advertising on the internet and in the death care industry is what has me concerned.

It is unchecked and by omission, false advertising. From some of the funeral directors, for example. They promote retail outlets, holding themselves out to be a casket store retailer, when in fact, they are not a retailer that is independent at all. But rather, a funeral director that is savvy to open a casket store, with only the intent to draw customers there, instead of a true casket store.

Of course we have this problem locally, not just on the internet - however it is something that needs to be addressed. Shouldn't a funeral director be required to display their funeral director's license or state they are selling the product? Or at least list true owner's name / corporation info for the site?

Seniors Prearranging On-line

- Consumers are searching on funeral related words nearly 500,000 times per month. *(Survey of top ten search engines)*

http://www.preneedwebsite.com/seniors_planning_on-line_research.htm

- On the internet, there are very few places to file a complaint - or get a response to it. As people are depending upon the internet and research/ sales from it - I believe this is a huge problem.

I complained to the IFCC (case number 10203218386587) on 3/20/02 about a site that had swiped all of the Store Directory off of the NCRA site, put it up, and opened a bogus site claiming to be a non profit (which IRS had no record) and a place to look up casket store retailers. The IFCC must be overwhelmed with reports of false advertising, as I nor the others that wrote in concerning the fake site, ever heard a word back from them, other than the original acknowledgement email.

Some funeral homes on the internet are now clarifying or placing advertising solely to clarify which funeral homes are locally owned, and which are not. As the large conglomerates seem to always have the higher price, and not listed indeed, if it is a corporation owned firm or not, the independent funeral home feel at a disadvantage by having the public be in the dark when they are trying to shop for funeral services. The same applies to casket stores, if the public were to become informed about the owner of the website (who is a mortician) , perhaps they might still try to compare prices with others, who are true casket retailers.

- **Of course the largest problem in the way of our success at casket retailing, is the restrictions from the wholesalers in purchasing caskets and grave liners. Not only does this happen, small manufactures (like Clarksburg who just sold to Aurora, and York who just sold to Matthews) are bought up by the large corporations, and stronger monopolies power is again, the retailers nightmare. When we can not get the product on the sale, through the internet or locally, it will put us out of business, by more lost sales each year.**

Plus, the industry has in place, boycotting, which everyone has become very afraid of, seeing it has worked so well in the past, putting those who might look to gain new customers, out of business by those who forbid it. copy in part from ----

<http://www.wired.com/news/print/0%2C1294%2C31890%2C00.html>

The funeral directors make one valid point, critics say: Only they carry the top casket brands. Batesville Caskets, the largest manufacturer in the US with over 40 percent of the market, won't sell to anyone but a licensed funeral director. Neither will York or Aurora, the Nos. 2 and 3 coffin-makers.

The funeral directors have made it very clear -- if you sell to the independents, then you lose their business.

"If I found out they were selling to Joe Schmoe Net retailer down the street, I'd change my casket company," said Lane.

To independent vendors, the arrangement smacks of illegal collusion. "It's an anti-trust issue. They're trying to lock us out of the market," said Laura Wend, an independent casket retailer and an officer at the National Casket Retailers Association, a trade group for independent sellers.

Industry lawyers are drawing up an anti-trust case, she said.

Batesville, at least, seems unconcerned. "We spend many dollars in court fighting against casket stores who sue us for not selling to them," said Joe Weigel, a Batesville spokesman. "As long as we remain consistent with our policy, we believe we'll be fine with the Federal Trade Commission." (END)--copied from, in part, an email I sent to the antitrust dept. Concerning the "agreement" that they had given to the independent funeral homes, concerning group purchasing power.

- ---- Subject: name brand casket deals
Date: Sat, 14 Sep 2002 14:07:53 -0400
From: Betty Brown <a-team@stratos.net>
Organization: A Team Masters
To: newcase.atr@usdoj.gov _

...I am Vice Chair of the National Casket Retailers Assoc. (NCRA at <http://www.casketstores.com>)

Please let me know if you can assist in getting help in this area.

We wish to have these "deals" removed or have the casket retailers included. Why should some get discounts, from firms that refuse to sell to others?

<http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/1999/January/009at.htm> ---end copy----

http://www.usdoj.gov/atr/public/press_releases/1999/2176.htm I truly believe that the **JUSTICE DEPARTMENT which allowed the agreement, didn't have all the facts, and this agreement should be vacated. If indeed, it is allowed to remain in place, include the casket retailers as part of this group buying power. Make these manufactures not be able to restrict the purchase of that name brand to third party retailers. Put casket stores on even footing within this agreement, as it is now, they are harmed, the public is harmed, and the monopoly is getting stronger, at other's expense.**

Betty Brown, CEO A Team Masters <http://www.burialitems.com> FTC workshop on internet sales Oct. 9th, 2002

“Morticians can obtain many name brand models in many colors for low wholesale prices already, without such an agreement in place, for less than the casket store retailer can. This ”agreement“ compounds the problem, as it gives further discounts to a group of people who is using the casket stores as a probable rival, when in fact, the retailers are not even counted in the group of people these name brand manufactures sell to!”

I have written to the department more than once. A few years ago, the reply was the FTC was in charge of the funeral rule - and more recently, the response was wanting to know who was being harmed. Please look into this, as the people who surf the internet should be free to purchase the caskets at the best possible price, any name brand casket.

- The sales on the internet are only part of the growth or not, of casket retailers. Another great thing about the internet, is the ease of communication. (Or NOT!) I wrote to
To: naics@census.gov, casketstores@email.com

Subject: casket store retailers

Date: Wed, 14 Aug 2002 13:00:19 -0700

I am Vice Chair of the NCRA, we are a new industry of about 6 yrs, and need a special category as well. Our site is <http://www.casketstores.com> for the NCRA , however our membership is actual stores, all selling (not making) caskets, urns and some also sell head stones and or grave liners and many other funeral related "goods" Closest I would think it would be is 812299 -all other death industry retailers. Please let me know if indeed you can make this a fact. Thanks, Betty (I also am a woman owned biz and wish to sell grave liners direct to the VA cemeteries, so I need this SIC code asap) Thanks again, Betty Brown **(END)**

No response!! A government agency should strive to return an answer to all emails with valid concerns. So in a sense, the internet has flaws. Can the FTC assist in this Sic Code matter?

- Trying to cover a lot in this “report” I also believe the American public should be MORE informed - make it a requirement that each casket carry a manufacturers name and model number. And WHERE it was made. As today, most do not. Many carry serial numbers, which the industry can trace, but most shoppers would like to be able to know what, from where and from whom they are buying. The hidden information is perhaps, or lack of -- is to make it difficult for shoppers to compare name brands, models, and price, on and off of the internet. A lot of people only purchase products “MADE in the USA” and this purchase does not even carry that information, most of the time.

Thank you for the attention and invitation to write to the FTC concerning matters that relate to the restrictions of sales on the internet. Sites to get more information on concerning the manufactures of caskets and funeral goods, and funeral home listings are <http://www.abbottandhast.com/links.html> <http://www.funeralnet.com/> <http://www.1stfuneral.com/> <http://www.cfsaa.org/Menu%20to%20members/membprod.htm>

A TEAM Master's . <http://www.burialitems.com> **And email is a-team@stratos.net**

If you have any questions concerning this : Contact BETTY BROWN, 440-942-8769